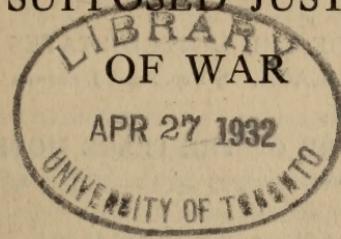


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SOME SUPPOSED JUST CAUSES



BY

HON. JACKSON H. RALSTON

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SOME SUPPOSED JUST CAUSES OF WAR

By Hon. JACKSON H. RALSTON
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Diplomatists and statesmen — we must mention both, for all diplomats are not statesmen, and all statesmen are not diplomats — agree often and so express themselves in treaties, that for honor and vital interests nations may wage what is dignified by the title of "solemn war," and that they must be permitted so to do at their good pleasure, even though the doors of the Hague tribunal of arbitration swing freely upon their hinges, and possible judges wait the sound of the footsteps of the representatives of litigant states. Honor and vital interests — how sonorous these words sound! Resolve them into their elements — passion, avarice, commercial and territorial aggrandizement — and the result is verbiage so crude as to grate upon modern susceptibilities. Let us continue to use grand words to conceal ignoble thoughts!

But it is only those aggregations of human units that we call nations that may, without crime and without judicial punishment, slay, burn, rob, and destroy. Why this logically should be the case we are at a loss to understand. Why the inherent rights of the individual to determine such questions as concern his honor or vital interests should be mercilessly abridged, and why cities and towns (and not nations) should be deprived of the full and free exercise of their most violent passions, one is unable to comprehend. Should not the power of both city and

Address at the New England Peace Congress, Hartford, Conn., May 9, 1910

nation, or else of neither, be submitted to the ruling care of the judiciary? Is there anything peculiar about the situation of a city or of a state which should deprive it of the free exercise of its faculties? Let us examine into the question by considering first a couple of supposititious cases, either of which may find its full parallel in history, and offering a justification for war fully as well founded as the justification furnished for many wars of the past between nations.

New York, as we all know, is a great collection of human beings, greater than was boasted by all the cities of Greece, of whose wars we read with sanguinary pleasure,—greater than Rome possessed after she had subdued all Italy. New Yorkers are overflowing her civic boundaries into New Jersey, even as Japanese are overflowing from Japan into Korea or Manchuria. Let us listen to the musings of a future chieftain of Tammany Hall, whose domain is coextensive with that of Greater New York. He says:

New York is imperial, and every New Yorker feels the glow of patriotic pride when he gazes on the vast fleets coming from all quarters of the globe to share in the profits of her commerce. The bosom of every home-loving New Yorker must swell with pride as he contemplates her magnificent structures, at once index and emblem of her greatness. Here liberty reigns, here the son of the poorest immigrant, as illustrated in my own person, may become ruler. But with all this, New York is in her swaddling clothes. Imaginary lines bound her on the north, while to the west the jurisdiction of the city is limited by the North River, beyond which a New Yorker may not go without being in danger of losing his political allegiance and being absorbed by an alien community. Every patriotic instinct demands that New York should extend her boundaries so that her sons may have room in which to live and contribute to the glory of their native city.

And withal a subconscious voice whispers, "Let this come to pass, and greater will be Tammany and more luscious the spoils thereof."

What more effective appeal to true patriotism could be made! And when you add the promise to the valiant sons of the Bowery or of Harlem that the rich lands of the Jerseys shall be

theirs, that the superabundance of their neighbors in cows and corn and strawberries shall be their abundance, can you not imagine with what fervor the embattled warriors of Yorkville and the Bronx, the Bowery and the Battery, would fall upon their weaker neighbors across the North River and openly put to the sword each offending owner of a herd of cows or of a promising strawberry patch? And the cause of war, that is, the ostensible cause of war? No matter. Perhaps a bibulous New Yorker, suffering from the Sunday drought of his city and seeking consolation in Hoboken, has been arrested somewhat roughly and given a disagreeable sample of Jersey justice, against which every city-loving citizen of Manhattan raises protest and cries for war. Anything will do as long as the desire exists for dominion over rich lands across the river, as long, in other words, as the "vital interests" of New York rulers—money always being vital—demand an extension of New York's power. And now that we have the honor of New York assailed in the person of her intoxicated citizen, vital interests compel war.

And yet we live in such an unmanly, effete, and degenerate age and country that should the mighty cohorts of Tammany, desisting from the milder pleasures of Coney Island, advance upon New Jersey, the United States, whose peace had been disturbed, would speedily put them to rout.

But withal, reason would rest with the Tammany chieftain. His orators could, with propriety, contend that the entity he represents was old enough, big enough, rich enough, to be allowed to fight without foreign interference. With patriotic pride could they point to examples of cities less important whose struggles, based upon identical principles, occupy many interesting and laudatory pages of history. With swelling pride could they repel the idea that Californians and Kentuckians and Vermonters, having no knowledge of, or sympathy with, their patriotic aspirations, should band themselves together to subdue the manly New Yorker, struggling only to advance his peculiar civilization.

Their logic, from the standpoint of the Englishman subduing the Boers, the Japanese seizing Manchuria, yes, the American pursuing the Filipino or forcing him to take false oaths of allegiance, would be irresistible. But logic does not always rule, and the New Yorker would find that, save by the permission of the Jerseyites, and with the leave of yokel representatives gathered in Congress from all parts of the Union, and the consent of the New York legislature, the rule of Tammany must remain confined to such parts of the state of New York as the state shall permit.

But let us approach the problem from another point of view. Great as is New York, let us imagine that Boston rivals her in the commerce of the world; that every favoring breeze brings to Boston the largess of the whole globe; that, despite all the Gotham efforts, Boston's growing commercial advantages directly affect New York, whose rent rolls steadily diminish. Figure to yourself that there arises a new Cato, whose morning and evening editions print at their top, in blood-red letters, *Delenda est Boston*. The public mind becomes attuned to the cry. In an unlucky moment a Bostonian in New York, whose unhappy pronunciation of the letter "A" reveals his origin, becomes involved in difficulties necessitating a visit to the Tombs. Boston peremptorily demands his release. New York scornfully refuses, and New Yorkers are insulted by Boston's wrathful rejoinder. Here again honor and vital interests demand blood, and under the old logical rule the solemn arbitrament of war must determine the issue. Alas! once more the men of other places, heedless of the honor of the two cities and blind to all interests save their own, step forward and forbid resort to any other instrumentality than the artificial one of courts, if a legal injury may be said to exist. Alas, again, the insult to the honor of the two cities does not constitute an injury of sufficient gravity to be considered by any national court.

But if these suggestions seem the wild vagaries of imagination, let us take more concrete examples. The drainage of the

city of Chicago pours itself out into the Illinois River, and diagonally across the state the current flows to join the purer waters of the Mississippi. Soon the flood reaches St. Louis, and endangers the integrity of its water supply. Shall not every stalwart Missourian who feels his bosom beat with love for his state fly to arms, cross the Mississippi, and relentlessly fall upon the luckless citizens of the state of Illinois? Shall the health, the comfort, the prosperity of Missouri be ruthlessly attacked by a neighboring state and the injury not be wiped out in blood? Must the Missourian stand supinely by while the population of his state becomes decimated by disease set at work by the carelessness of people alien to his state government, and whose actions have conclusively shown their lack of courtesy and civilization? Are not such people worse even than peoples whose skins are black or perhaps yellow? Is it not the high mission of St. Louis to carry civilization even to the banks of the Sangamon? Is it not part of the Missourian's share of the burden of humanity to teach the true gospel of the golden rule to the backward denizens of Pike, Cook, and Jo Davies counties? Must not these questions be answered in the affirmative but for the fact that Missouri and Illinois recognize as a common superior an artificial entity called the United States, which forbids such war and relegates both parties to peaceful courts, where, with the assistance of bacteriologists, lawyers, and judges, the issues are fought out without the pomp or circumstance of war? Are we not indeed living in a dull, uneventful age, and inflicting upon the young men of both states the canker of peace? But once again the logic of war is denied and the manly virtues remain undeveloped.

Yet another illustration. The state of Kansas contends that the waters descending from the mountains of Colorado should be allowed by Colorado's citizens to pursue their way unvexed and undiminished, to render more fertile the plains of the Sunflower State. The vital interests of the states collide. Shall the interest of bleeding Kansas be allowed to suffer because of the

selfish and grasping policy of the men of Colorado? Invoking the soul of John Brown as it goes marching on, let the Kansans march upon the sons of the Centennial State and slaughter them until they learn how to live and let live. Alas! once more, war, which, like poverty, is justified because we have always had it and the contrary is against human nature, is suppressed; and the great sovereign states of Kansas and Colorado are forced to bow to the dictations of nine men in black robes, only one of whom, and he by chance, happens to be a citizen of either state.

I have given you two imaginary and two actual illustrations of circumstances which, by all the books, would justify war. In two cases honor dictates, and in all four vital interests demand it. The only restraining thing is that the contending parties are, in each case, subject to the control of a judicial body. In vain could any of the states named declare their right to determine for themselves what was needed to satisfy their own honor or to maintain their own true interests. Always their neighbors insist upon their own superior right to preserve the peace of the continent.

But so little civilized are we internationally that books are written about the rules of war; that the right of blockade is recognized between nations; that, because of brawls with which no outside party has any concern, the commerce of neutrals is interfered with, the property of their citizens often exposed to the ravages of war on land, while neutral governments, unlike the onlookers at a street fight, who content themselves with making a ring about the contestants, accept limitations upon their own conduct made by the fighters themselves. Can we not learn that there is no more dignity, no more glory, about a national dispute, about a national conflict, than there is in a duel between two neighbors over the proper placing of a line fence?

And if the well-being of the community demands that the quarrels of neighbors shall be determined by a legal court, if the rivalries of cities and states must find in this country their settlement in dispassionate tribunals, why should there not be,

judicially at least, the United States of the world, with a tribunal capable of passing upon all international questions without restrictions?

We may here pride ourselves on believing that we are going with the swing of international feeling; that with the spread of intelligence, with a greater recognition of the equality of human beings, which in the last analysis denies the right of one man to require another to sacrifice his life and property without just cause, duly ascertained by cold and competent tribunals, there must come a time when war will be looked upon as the crime that it is. The stars in their courses fight for us.

Let it not be said that I am inappreciative of the dignity of war and of the importance of the causes leading up to it. War has no dignity. It offers a tragedy and a farce. With the tragic element we are all too familiar. With the farce of it all we are less familiar, for it is one of those obvious things—so obvious and so accustomed that, like the movement of the earth around the sun, eons of time pass by without its realization. What can be more farcical than that human beings should be dressed up in gold lace and waving plumes to go forth to slay other human beings in waving plumes and gold lace? Why should bearskin shakos be used to add ferocity to their ensemble? Why should the common people, whose interest in the matter is nil, make themselves food for powder, all for the benefit of the few whose tinsel decorations blind their own eyes and those of the beholders? And why should parents who love their offspring rush into opportunities of bequeathing to them legacies of national poverty and debt as the result of a display of passion on the part of the fathers? And when all this is the work of sentient human beings, may we not wonder over their effrontery in speaking of themselves as reasoning creatures? Are nations so rushing into conflict wiser than the mad bull in the arena that with lowered head dashes upon the sword of the matador? May we not conceive of a real philosopher looking down with wondering and puzzled contempt and amazement at our bloody antics over baubles?

For as yet we are but children and have the ways of children. Between the childish disputes, "It is," "It is n't," or "I want to swing," "No, I won't let you swing," and the average difference between nations leading to war, there is in essence no distinction, — nothing save the age and number of the disputants and the consequent variance in the objects which interest them. Relatively, the contest is unchanged, and equally it should be adjusted without killing and without the slow sapping away of life through taxation.

But if you tell me that such doctrines as I have tried to set out are opposed to patriotism, let me say to you that patriotism is not a fixed, but a growing term. When the first Englishmen planted themselves on the borders of Massachusetts Bay, their patriotism was bounded by the fringes of woods concealing Indian enemies. Later it meant a special sense of duty to those within the widening boundaries of the province. Yet a few years, and with the birth of a new nation, all who lived within the bounds of the thirteen original states were recognized as their brothers. Then, by leaps and bounds, it came to pass that the teeming millions of human beings from the Atlantic to the Pacific represented the solidarity of the country, and all were recognized as brothers under a common flag, and between such brothers war was a crime, and all troubles to be determined in a peaceful manner.

But one step is left. We have to recognize the brotherhood of the human race and the infinite crime of bloody contests between members of a common family. When the day of such recognition arrives we shall love our immediate neighbors no less, and for them reserve the special offices that our finite strength limits us to giving to the relatively few, while the narrower features of the patriotism of to-day will be swallowed up in a broad consideration for the rights of humanity, and all men will be brothers.

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